

Message Text

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ORIGIN NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 PM-04

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 DODE-00

PRS-01 /057 R

DRAFTED BY NEA/AFN:MCKING/NH

APPROVED BY NEA/AFN:WSWEISLOGEL

NEA/EGY:GBEYER (DRAFT)

INR/RNA:PSTODDARD (SUBS)

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O P 011812Z SEP 76

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TO AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY

S E C R E T STATE 216856

LONDON FOR KINSOLVING

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MCAP, EG, LY

SUBJECT: LIBYAN/EGYPTIAN CONFRONTATION

REF: (A) KINSOLVING/PALMER TELCON, (B) TRIPOLI 1163

1. WE ARE CONTINUING TO MONITOR CLOSELY THE FEUD BETWEEN QADHAFI AND SADAT WHICH COULD RESULT IN HOSTILITIES. ON THE MILITARY FRONT, RECENT MOVES INCLUDE:

-- THE REMAINING ELEMENTS OF AN EGYPTIAN ARMORED DIVISION WERE SCHEDULED TO ARRIVE IN WESTERN EGYPT AUGUST 28. TANKS ON RAIL CARS WERE SEEN HEADED WEST FROM ALEXANDRIA AND EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE COMMANDERS WERE SUMMONED TO A MEETING IN MATRUH LAST WEEKEND.

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-- THE GULF OF SOLLUM, ADJACENT TO THE LIBYAN BORDER, HAS BEEN CLOSED TO NAVIGATION THROUGH THE CURRENT WEEK.

2. BY THE END OF LAST WEEK DEPARTMENT NOTED GOE COMMENTS ON LIBYA UNDER QADHAFI WERE INCREASINGLY HOSTILE (SEE SEPTTEL). FOR EXAMPLE, FOREIGN MINISTER FAHMI SAID "QADHAFI IS NOW UNDESIRABLE ON THE ARAB MAP...." MEDIA FILLED WITH

NEWS OF LUXOR HIJACKING INCIDENT AND DETENTION AUGUST 24 OF TWO EGYPTIANS IN TRIPOLI FROM PLANE CHARTERED BY EGYPTIANS. BY AUGUST 30, HOWEVER, EMBASSY CAIRO NOTED THAT MEDIA COVERAGE--WHILE EXTENSIVE--REFRAINED FROM REPEATING PROMISES OF REVENGE SO CONSPICUOUS EARLIER.

3. DEPARTMENT BELIEVES GOE MAY BE CONSIDERING ITS OPTIONS RE LIBYA IN NEAR TERM ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT ASSESS WITH PRECISION WHAT FORM OR COMBINATION OF FORMS ANY ACTION MIGHT TAKE. THE FOLLOWING ARE POSSIBLE MILITARY ACTIONS AVAILABLE:

A. A RUN FOR TRIPOLI BY LAND FORCES

B. DESTRUCTION OF COMMANDO TRAINING CAMPS IN WESTERN LIBYA

C. LANDING SEABORNE TROOPS FOR QUICK STRIKE AT TRIPOLI, POSSIBLY COORDINATED WITH INTERNAL COUP AGAINST QADHAFI REGIME, AND SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT REMOVAL OF QADHAFI FROM POWER.

D. LIMITED MILITARY ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE CONTROL OF KEY INSTALLATIONS IN TRIPOLI, BENGHAZI, OIL PRODUCTION CENTERS AND MILITARY BASES IN SUPPORT OF INTERNAL UPRISING AGAINST QADHAFI OR IN SUPPORT OF GOE-SPONSORED CANDIDATE(S)--INCLUDING EXILED LIBYAN DISSIDENT(S)--TO REPLACE QADHAFI.

4. BECAUSE OF GEOGRAPHIC FACTORS (DISTANCE OF TRIPOLI FROM BORDER AND TERRAIN), PROBABLE OBJECTIONS FROM OTHER ARAB STATES TO GOE MILITARY INTERVENTION WHICH COULD BE VIEWED AS THREAT OF ANNEXATION, AND QUESTIONABLE VALUE OF TRIPOLI ITSELF AS OBJECTIVE, WE DOUBT SADAT WOULD CHOOSE
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ALTERNATIVE "A" IN PARA ABOVE. IT ALSO WOULD INVOLVE HIGHER PRICE IN MEN AND MATERIEL THAN WE THINK SADAT IS WILLING TO PAY (BASED ON EARLIER EGYPTIAN EXPERIENCE IN YEMEN). HOWEVER, SOME ANALYSTS BELIEVE SADAT HAS INVESTED CONSIDERABLE PRESTIGE IN THE MILITARY BUILDUP AND THE PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN AGAINST QADHAFI AND THEREFORE THAT HE MIGHT ACT IN ACCORD WITH ALTERNATIVE "B" TO AVOID A LOSS OF FACE, IF NO OTHER ACTION TO UNSEAT QADHAFI

APPEARED FEASIBLE.

5. WE DOUBT GOE WILL OPT FOR MAJOR MILITARY ACTION UNLESS IT IS COORDINATED WITH CHALLENGE TO QADHAFI FROM WITHIN LIBYA OR ONE SPEARHEADED BY LIBYAN DISSIDENTS IN EXILE. THERE IS TO DATE, HOWEVER, NO EVIDENCE OF AN INDIGENOUS ORGANIZED OPPOSITION CAPABLE OF SUCH A MOVE. SHOULD THE

GOE MASTERMIND AND MOUNT A COUP, IT WOULD HAVE TO DIS-ENGAGE AS SOON AS NEW LIBYAN GOVERNMENT WERE ESTABLISHED OR RISK ALIENATING LIBYAN POPULACE AND INCURRING WRATH OF OTHER ARAB STATES. WE DOUBT THAT SADAT HIMSELF WOULD ATTEMPT TO ORGANIZE THE ASSASSINATION OF HIS ARAB NEIGHBOR BECAUSE OF HIS OWN PERSONAL ANTIPATHY TO SUCH A COURSE AND BECAUSE OF CONDEMNATION SUCH ACT WOULD LIKELY BRING DOWN ON HIM FROM OTHER ARAB LEADERS.

6. SEPTEMBER 1 IS ANNIVERSARY OF QADHAFI'S COUP AGAINST KING IDRIS AND WE THINK IT HIGHLY PROBABLE THAT THE COLONEL WILL GO AHEAD WITH HIS "THREAT" TO BREAK DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH EGYPT. THIS MIGHT PRECIPITATE EGYPTIAN ACTION. SEPTEMBER 1 CELEBRATION WITH CONCENTRATION LIBYAN LEADERSHIP IN CAPITAL AND ASSOCIATED MILITARY DISPLAYS MIGHT ALSO BE PROPITIOUS MOMENT FOR COUP. ON THE OTHER HAND, QADHAFI LOYALISTS WILL ALSO BE ESPECIALLY UNITED ON THIS OCCASION.

7. THERE ALSO ARE A VARIETY OF POLITICAL OPTIONS WHICH ARE OPEN TO SADAT. HE MAY CONFINE HIMSELF TO A CONTINUED OR STEPPED UP MEDIA CAMPAIGN AGAINST QADHAFI, OR SUBMIT FORMAL COMPLAINT TO ARAB LEAGUE OR OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS.

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8. FYI. WE ARE SENDING BY SEPTTEL AN INR APPRAISAL DATED AUGUST 30. ROBINSON

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MONITORING, REPORTS, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 01 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: coburnhl
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976STATE216856
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: MCKING/NH
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760332-0221
From: STATE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t197609100/aaaadiev.tel
Line Count: 156
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ORIGIN NEA
Original Classification: SECRET
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: SECRET
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 KINSHASA 1976, 76 TRIPOLI 1163
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: coburnhl
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 MAY 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 MAY 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <13 SEP 2004 by coburnhl>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LIBYAN/EGYPTIAN CONFRONTATION
TAGS: PFOR, MCAP, EG, LY
To: LONDON
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006